



To Hell & Back

California's heroic
Green Berets return
home with 40 Bronze
Stars and two soldiers
wounded in action.

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The 19th Special Forces Group, or the Green Berets, with teams in Redwood City and Los Alamitos returned home in early June after spending six months in Afghanistan striking a major blow against global terrorism.

The heroic unit earned more than 40 Bronze Stars and sustained two wounded in action casualties during their service. Its 85 members were divided into small teams and worked throughout the entire country of Afghanistan. They trained and accompanied company and battalion-sized Afghan units on several missions ranging from surveillance and reconnaissance to combat engagements, according to SFC Kenneth Stearn, unit administrator for the 19th Special Forces Group.

“There were times when the only hot water they had came from pots that they were cooking with on cook stoves,” said Stearn. “But that’s the kind of missions that the special forces have been doing as long as they have been in existence.”

These missions often required the Green Berets to operate in rugged terrain, sometimes crawling into deep caves, or maneuvering between steep, rocky cliffs. They were constantly exposed to danger. Two of these warriors, SFC Michael Lyons and SFC Christopher Martin, sustained wounds on December 17, 2002 while on a mission in downtown Kabul, Afghanistan. They had just finished business in a busy marketplace and were leaving the area in a “Waz”—a Russian jeep. After stopping at a congested traffic stop, terrorists, armed with AK-47s and homemade hand grenades, seized the opportunity to launch an attack on the soldiers. The soldiers escaped with their lives but sustained wounds after a hand grenade crashed through the vehicle’s windshield and exploded.

Lyons and Martin received purple hearts and a ticket home. Their road home, however, ran through New York City where the California National Guard soldiers joined special forces soldiers from other units in appearances on numerous television shows. Their New York tour also included a visit to “ground zero,”—or the site of the World Trade Towers where America’s War on Terrorism began. 🐾

Opposite: Members of the California National Guard’s 19th Special Forces Group listen as MG Paul D. Monroe, Jr., The Adjutant General, and Governor Gray Davis welcome them home at a special ceremony at Los Alamitos.

Right: (1) Governor Davis pins the Bronze Star on a California National Guard Green Beret.

(2) California’s Green Berets stand at attention and proudly wear their Bronze Stars for the first time.

(3) MG Paul D. Monroe, Jr. salutes a member of the 19th Special Forces Group for a job well done.

(4) SFC Christopher Martin (far left with cane) and SFC Michael Lyons second from left with crutches) visit New York’s Ground Zero on their way home.

